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TWENTY-FIVE YEARS OF LOCAL HISTORY WORK.

BY J. M. GUINN.

(Read November 1, 1908.)

This evening we celebrate the quarter centennial of the organization of the Historical Society of Southern California. On the evening of November 1, 1883, fifteen representative men of Los Angeles met in the northeast corner room of the second story of the old Temple Block to form a Historical Society. These men were: J. J. Warner, Antonio F. Coronel, John G. Downey, George Hansen, H. D. Barrows, J. M. Guinn, John Mansfield, Ira More, C. N. Wilson, John B. Niles, A. Kohler, A. J. Bradley, E. W. Jones, Marcus Baker and Noah Levering. Of these, eleven are dead; two, weary of unrequited toil, have fallen out of the ranks, and but two—H. D. Barrows and J. M. Guinn—are now members of the Society.

The birthplace of the Society was a police court room—dark, dingy and uninviting—its only attraction, it was rent free. The judge of the court, August Kohler, was one of the Society's founders.

Old Temple Block, where the Society was born, still stands. Its appearance has not improved with age. The more than half a century of years that have passed over its head have left their impress on it. Homely in its infancy, unattractive in its prime, and ugly in its old age, the towering sky-scrapers of these latter days look down upon its squat figure with contempt; and yet there was a time in the long ago when it was the paisano's pride and the promoter's joy—when the citizen pointed it out as a portent of the prosperity that was coming to the Angel City. Its story of tragedy, comedy and commonplace has never been told, perhaps never will be. It is a historic house without a history. Progress, the enemy of antiquity, will some day push it out of the way, and the rising generation—that intangible thing that is always rising but never seems to get up—will chuckle over its demolition.

The Historical Society of Southern California in its twenty-five years has had a checkered career. Artemus Ward once said he did not know what a checkered career meant, but he just put it into his piece because it sounded well. The Historical Society has had many checks in its career. They were not of its own making, but adventitious circumstances pushed them into its life. Early in its career it moved from the place of its birth, the police court room, to a room in the second story of the Nadeau Hotel building. The Nadeau had just been completed. It was found to be too

large for the travel of that period—the tourist had not yet discovered Los Angeles—and beside, it was too far down-town. So the proprietors rented a portion of it for offices. What was intended for a dining room on the second floor was rented for a justice's court. The Society secured the room for its monthly meetings. Here it flourished like the fabled green bay tree, and increased rapidly in membership. It gave a reception to John C. Fremont, the Pathfinder, and his estimable wife, who were made honorary members of the Society. It also gave a reception to Prof. Asa Gray, the father of botany, and received Lyman C. Draper, the founder of the Wisconsin Historical Society, the largest in America. After a stay of a year in the Nadeau, the room where its meetings were held was needed for other purposes, and the Society, following the Star of Empire, migrated westward and found a lodging place in the office of the Normal School Building on West Fifth street. Here it dwelt in peace, but not in prosperity. The peace was too profound and quietude too unbroken. The Normal School was then in the suburbs of the city, and the members were averse to wandering through unpeopled wastes over ungraded streets in pursuit of historical information. The minutes of that period frequently read, "No quorum present, Society adjourned." After a short stay at the Normal School, it retraced its steps to a point nearer the center of population and located in the Council chamber of the old City Hall. This is a two-story building in the rear of the Bryson Building, and fronts on West Second street. The building has passed out of the city's possession.

Here it remained until 1889, when the City Board of Education evicted it. Then it crossed the hallway and took up its abode in the police court room over the city jail. Although never a criminal or a fugitive from justice, in its early years it had quite an extensive acquaintance with courts.

After a few months the solons of the Board of Education found more comfortable quarters in the new City Hall on Broadway, and the Society moved back into its old quarters, which in the meantime had been converted into a city court room. Here it remained until 1896, when it again became a wanderer. It cut its acquaintance with court rooms and sought an entrance into private families. Since then it has held its meetings at the residences of its members in Los Angeles and Pasadena. This has been done in part through motives of economy, the income of the Society not being sufficient to allow of paying rent for a hall, and in part to accommodate its widely scattered membership.

Its library and collections have kept pace in their wanderings with the Society. At first they were stored in the Normal School building. From there, in 1891, they were moved to the fourth

story of the new Court House. The Supervisors leased the Society a large and well-lighted room. Here it set up its household gods. The room was open to members and visitors at certain hours. The collections were on display. The Society was riding on the very crest of a wave of prosperity, but the wave broke—the ceaseless break, break, break of the breakers of adversity have been pounding it ever since.

The County Surveyor cast envious eyes on the Society's snug quarters. When our lease expired an edict went forth from the Board of Supervisors that the Society must move its collections.

In vain did we plead with men owning buildings—men who had grown rich by the city's growth—to give us the free use of a room in one of their buildings. They were deaf to our appeals, and we were compelled to move our collection into the gallery of Judge Van Dyke's court room. There it reposed in dust and darkness for ten years, but in the meantime steadily growing in bulk. Then the whirligig of politics placed a judge in the room who knew us not. The court room was remodeled and the collections of the Society ordered moved out of their roosting place. Upstairs to the fourth floor of the Court House our belongings were carried and deposited in a small dingy room, unlighted and unventilated, except by a transom over the door. We hoped that the limit had been reached and that no one would drive us out of our undesirable quarters. Vain hope! One morning on opening the door of our dingy room I found our collection stacked promiscuously in one end of the room—books, newspapers, furniture, curios—piled in a heterogeneous mass reaching to the ceiling. Through opposite walls of the room two great holes had been cut and workmen were engaged in constructing a hallway across the room.

Inquiry elicited the information that the newly elected District Attorney, in order to make a short cut to his private office, had the work done. No notice had been given the Society of the proposed change. The hallway was completed and we were left in possession of what remained of the room, but not for long. The District Attorney needed a room for his retainers where they might be at his beck and call. An edict of banishment from the Court House was promulgated. The best the Supervisors could offer us was a corner in the county warehouse on New High street, across the street from the new Postoffice building. A room was partitioned off in one end of the building, and on the ides of May, 1907, we shook the dust of the Court House, or as much of it as we could get off our collections, and removed them to their last resting place. Whether it will be their final, remains to be seen. There, in cases, in drawers, in boxes and bundles, and stacked on the floor, dust covered and inaccessible for reference, our library and relics are stored.

Early in our history we undertook to preserve files of the daily and weekly newspapers of Southern California. It was a laudable ambition, but with our limited space and frequent removals an impracticable one. The publishers gradually cut our acquaintance—that is, stopped our papers—but in the meantime a great pile of newspapers, amounting to two or three tons, had accumulated. These, when we removed from the Court House, were turned over to the Public Library.

Throughout our residence in the Court House the various Boards of Supervisors have been kind to us. It has not been their fault that, like Little Joe, we have had to move on. The ever-increasing demand for more room has compelled them to utilize every inch of space available.

In the years that passed since that coterie of men gathered in old Temple Block to found the Society, we have made several vigorous attempts to secure a building of our own, or at least a part of one.

The first was made sixteen years ago. In conjunction with the Trustees of the Public Library, we induced the City Council to call an election for the purpose of voting upon the issue of \$50,000 in bonds to build a Library and Historical Building in Central Park. The election was called. Then the oratorical freaks that in former days aired their eloquence in that Free Forum (Central Park); the wind-jammers whose vapid maunderings made life a burden to their listeners; the workingmen who toiled with their jaws, and the man afraid of taxes—all rose up and went to the polls and voted against the bond issue, and it was lost.

Our next effort was in 1905. A bill was introduced in the State Legislature appropriating \$125,000 to build a building to be used jointly by the newly created Appellate Court and the Historical Society. It passed both houses of the Legislature and went to the Governor for his signature. I kept the telegraph wires hot with flashes of influence to induce the wavering Governor to affix his name to the bill, but in vain; he vetoed it on the plea that the Legislature had appropriated a million dollars more than the State's revenue. Yet at the same time he signed a bill appropriating nearly \$400,000 to appease the unceasing cry of give! give! from that horseleach's daughter, the State Capitol. And now comes a constitutional amendment to "ditch" the reconstructed Capitol at Sacramento and rear a five-million-dollar one at Berkeley. Verily, the ways of the politician are past finding out.

What trifles sometimes turn the scales in our life struggles. A few scratches of the Governor's pen at the foot of that bill would have put us on the king's highway; yes, on the royal road to prosperity. Omitted, and we are floundering in the Slough of Despond. With that appropriation we could have built a handsome building

in which to store our collections. These would have increased a thousand-fold. Members would have flocked to our standard; our library would have become an educational factor in enlightening the people on the history of the State they live in. The cost to the overburdened taxpayers would have been but the fractional part of a cent on the hundred dollars of their assessed valuation. The added burden would not have elicited a groan from the most heavily laden purveyor to the public revenue.

That such enlightenment is sadly needed is made apparent whenever the early history of the State is touched upon by the daily press, or when some callow historian undertakes to write up some incident or adventure of the olden times in magazine literature.

The density of ignorance in regard to the early history of California is as black as the darkness of Egypt in the time of Moses. The newspaper reporters who dish up the mental pabulum that the average citizen feeds upon can be fooled by any fake story of early times, no matter how absurd. Some *probable* son of Los Angeles who may have spent a week or two in the city, before the boom, returns. He finds a grown-up modern city and wonders thereat. He seeks out a reporter and has himself interviewed. He describes the "wild and woolly West" character of the old pueblo when he was here two decades ago. Then every man went armed to the teeth, and men who had died with their boots on were scattered promiscuously around the Plaza. Oh, it was gory times in the old pueblo then. With these pioneers of the boom, Los Angeles is always the old pueblo. They do not know that Los Angeles has been a *ciudad*, or city, for nearly three-quarters of a century—that it put on urban airs before Chicago did.

If all the write-ups of early Los Angeles that appear in the public press could be collected and illuminated by the light of the real facts in the case, *i. e.*, contrasted with the true story of the event, they would make the most comical history ever written.

Our Society has exposed many of the current historical fakes, but, like Banquo's ghost, they will not down. Occasionally one of them is exorcised. The olden-time saloon and later-time Chinese wash-house that for years has figured annually in illustrated papers as Fremont's headquarters, has been struck by the wand of Progress and crumbled to dust. It is down and out, and no camera fiend will ever again snap-shot it.

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If I had the time and you had the patience, I might narrate for you by the volume some of the wonderful discoveries made in California history by callow historians. I give a few samples:

When Commodore Evans' fleet was on its way up the Pacific Coast, one of the leading Los Angeles papers reported that San Diego's gift to "Fighting Bob" was to be a golden key in an olive wood box. The box was made from the wood of an olive tree planted by a Spaniard two hundred and fifty years ago. It would be a tale worth telling—how that lone Spaniard slipped into San Diego a hundred and ten years before Governor Portola and Father Serra planted a mission in California, and then slipped out again, leaving the record of his tree-planting feat where it could be found when needed.

Here is another choice extract that has gone abroad as veritable history. It relates to Rubidoux Mountain, at Riverside. It is headed "Romantic Memories": "There cleaves to this old mountain a good deal of romance. In the days of Father Junipero Serra and his co-workers the good mission padres traveled through this valley between Pala and San Gabriel, and then at a later period General Fremont himself led his brave little body of pathfinders down over the San Gorgonio Pass, through Riverside, across the river, and rested for the night at the old Rubidoux mansion, which is standing to this day, across the river and under the shadow of the cross which has been erected on the summit of the mountain. The Rubidoux were good Catholics, and their home was also the resting place of the mission fathers in their travels from one mission to another."

In the days of Father Junipero there was no Pala. The Mission of San Luis Rey, of which Pala was an *assistencia*, was not founded until fourteen years after the death of Serra. The "good mission padres" always traveled from Pala to San Gabriel by the coast route. General Fremont never "led a brave little body of pathfinders through the San Gorgonio Pass." He was never through the Pass until he went by railroad. His pathfinders could not have found Rubidoux mansion. It was not built when Fremont's pathfinders were here. "The Rubidoux were good Catholics and their home was always the resting place of the mission fathers in their travels from one mission to another." Rubidoux did not come to California until 1844—ten years after the secularization of the missions, and his mansion was not built until the last mission padre was dead or had left the country. With these callow historians the mission padres are always traveling up and down the coast on the mythical Camino Real. As a matter of fact, they did very little traveling. They had enough work at the missions to keep them busy.

Here is a choice bit of California history that was discovered and exploited at the time the Jamestown Exposition was in the process of evolution. It was deemed of such great importance that it was sent as an "exclusive dispatch" by "direct wire" to a leading newspaper of Los Angeles:

WASHINGTON, March 23, 1906—"The Jamestown (Va.) Exposition project received a black eye today when Frank H. Powers, of Carmel-by-the-Sea, Cal., came to the capitol with the proof that the first white settlement in the United States limits was not Jamestown, but Carmel-by-the-Sea.

"Powers produced documents to prove that Viscan, the Spanish navigator, settled there in 1602, five years before Jamestown was founded, and named the place because the land was the exact duplicate of Mount Carmel in the Holy Land.

"The French navigator, Pelouse, in 1658, Powers says, made a map of the Pacific Coast, and in accompanying notes referred to Viscan's settlement in 1602.

"Powers claims there is other corroborative evidence to sustain his contention. He has laid the case before the California delegation and members of the House Committee on Industrial Arts and Expositions, and one of the latter, Representative Pollard of Nebraska, promised to bring the matter to the attention of the House."

The first white settlement in the United States limits, as every school boy in the eighth grade knows, or ought to know, was made at San Augustine, Florida, in 1565. No such party as Viscan ever explored the coast of California. Sebastian Viscaino explored the coast of California in 1602-3. He landed at San Diego and San Pedro, and, sailing through the Santa Barbara Channel, he discovered Monterey Bay. Viscaino, after his return to Mexico in 1603, endeavored to get assistance from Philip III, King of Spain, to plant a colony at Monterey, but the King's bank account at that time was overdrawn. Three years later Viscaino was given permission to found a settlement on the Bay of Monterey, but he died before the expedition was fitted out, and his colonization scheme died with him. As for Carmel-by-the-Sea, Viscaino never heard of it, nor did anyone else ever hear of it for nearly three hundred years after the old explorer's death.

The French navigator, La Perouse, visited California in 1786 and made a chart of a portion of the coast. Powers is off on the date of the Frenchman's arrival only one hundred and twenty-eight years. Powers "laid the case before the California delegation" in Congress. It is not probable that the delegation individually or collectively knew any more about the history of California than Powers does.

One more example of the bosh that is palmed off for California history—the last and the worst. It is to be found in a pamphlet descriptive of the town of Whittier. Thousands of copies of the book have been distributed through the Los Angeles Chamber of Commerce and have been sent abroad through other sources. It is a "bit of history" relative to Pio Pico's old house near the San Gabriel River:

"It was in the last days of the Spanish Dons. Already at Sutter's Mill had been found the first golden gleams which led to the mighty, mad rush of '49. Already General Fremont had begun that memorable movement which was to end in the overthrow of Mexican authority in California. But all unconscious of the coming change, Pio Pico, the last Mexican Governor of California, was taking his wedding journey over the immense tracts which were his by Spanish grant, so large and so varied in their location that it is said he could travel from San Francisco to San Diego and scarcely step on another's land. By the desire of his wife, they were seeking a location for their permanent home. Knowing the spot which the morning's drive would reach, Governor Pico said, 'Where we lunch today, there we will build our home.' And, though the adobe is crumbling and the timbers, carried on the backs of Indians from San Pedro Harbor, twenty miles away, are decayed and falling, the Pico mansion still stands, a monument to the wisdom of the Spaniard's choice."

This so-called "bit of history" contains about as many errors as it has words. At the time of the discovery of gold at "Sutter's Mill" the conquest of California had been completed a whole year, and Colonel Fremont (not General) had been a resident of Washington, D. C., nine months or more. "All unconscious of the coming change"—i. e., the conquest—"Pio Pico was taking his wedding journey." When gold was discovered, Pico was an exile in Mexico, where he had fled in August, 1846, when Stockton and Fremont took possession of Los Angeles. He had taken his wedding trip about fourteen years before. He was married in 1834 at the residence of his brother-in-law, Jose Antonio Carrillo, which stood where the Pico House—now the National Hotel—stands, in Los Angeles. He did not own at that time the rancho where the old house is built; it then belonged to the Mission San Gabriel. At the time gold was discovered at Sutter's Mill, Pico was a widower 47 years of age, with all the romance of youth knocked out of him. "It is said he could travel from San Francisco to San Diego and scarcely step on another's land." All of his landed possessions, three or four ranchos, were located either in the Los Angeles or San Diego district. He owned no land within 500 miles of San Francisco. None of them were Spanish grants; they were made by Governors of California. The timbers for the old mansion "were carried on the backs of Indians from San Pedro Harbor, twenty miles away." This statement caps the climax for stupid blundering. There was no lumber brought to San Pedro Harbor until several years after the American occupation of California, and then there were wagons in the country to haul it to its destination.

In the twenty-five years of its existence, our Society has issued twenty-three annual publications of papers read before it. These

constitute seven volumes, of about three hundred pages each. The topics discussed in these papers are treated monographically, and are generally regarded as historical authority upon the subjects of which they treat. Our publications are becoming more sought after each succeeding year. Volume one is out of print, and some of the others soon will be.

Our Society has expended over \$3000 in publication. Not a dollar of this has been obtained from the public funds of city, county or State. It has been contributed by a few public-spirited and patriotic men and women who believe that there is something in life loftier than mere commercialism, and in the literature we send abroad there should be something higher than laudations of climate and statistics of resources.

In the twenty-five years of our Society's existence we have distributed over seven thousand copies of its publications. These have gone into the hands of private individuals, and into college, state and historical libraries, in Europe and America.